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TAGS: [PREL](#) [FR](#) [GM](#) [UK](#) [IT](#) [ITALIAN](#) [POLITICS](#)

SUBJECT: TRILATERALISM: ITALY NOT ANNOYED, BUT, FOR NOW,
NOT OVERLY CONCERNED

REF: LONDON 470

Classified By: POLMINCOUNS TOM COUNTRYMAN. REASON: 1.5 (B)(D).

1. (C) Summary: The last thing Europe needs is a new troika. That's the consistent line taken by Italian government officials, in both public statements and conversations with Embassy Rome staff. The UK-French-German "trilateral" initiative (as described reftel) is divisive, diverts attention from constitutional treaty negotiations, and sends the wrong signal to the rest of Europe, not least to the accession states. Further, if Italy had been asked to join the club, it would have refused. There's clearly an element of rationalization in this principled stance. Still, the MFA is clearly concerned that this latest iteration of an EU "directorate" will disillusion accession states already wary of Brussels' increasing authority over their affairs. The menu of issues on which the "trilaterals'" views coalesce is limited enough, though, that it should naturally constrain their ability to drive too much EU policy. Italy agrees that a core group of members coming together, under the right circumstances, to push the EU forward may induce the other members to come to agreement on the institutional changes required to run the EU more efficiently at 25. End Summary.

2. (C) In an aside during a lunch with visiting US G-8 Poldir Glynn Davies (septel), MFA Political Director (and Ambassador-designate to the UK) Giancarlo Aragona, while clearly irritated about the "trilateralism" initiative, opined that the UK "had inserted itself" into an ongoing Franco-German dialogue simply in order to protect its own interests. Though member-states had long understood the "special psychology" underpinning the Franco-German relationship, they had little patience for a triumvirate that shared so few common positions, especially on internal EU issues. "We feel strongly" that it's simply a bad idea," Aragona underscored.

3. (C) MFA director for EU institutional issues, Giuseppe Buccino-Grimaldi, said that Prime Minister Frattini's public statement on January 20 and follow-up press interviews made clear that Italy agrees the EU integration process must accelerate, but disagrees on the trilateralism methodology. Frattini underlined (in that interview) that if Italy had been offered the opportunity to join the three, it would have refused. Most worrying, according to Buccino-Grimaldi, is that the initiative diverts attention from the ongoing effort to forge an EU constitution, and could undermine efforts to integrate new members. Italy is not necessarily opposed to smaller groups eventually taking the lead on key EU initiatives, but only in the context of structured cooperation as prescribed in a constitutional treaty, and with the ultimate aim of forging consensus on required institutional changes.

4. (C) Buccino-Grimaldi's view is that the inherent differences in how the three view key EU issues (particularly defense) will ultimately limit the influence of "trilateralism" in the long run, especially if ongoing negotiations begin to indicate chances for adoption of the constitutional treaty during the Irish or Dutch Presidencies. While echoing Frattini's assertion that Italy would have refused if asked to join the three, he did not close the door on Italy's participation in such a grouping should it become apparent that agreement on a constitutional treaty is not possible.

5. (C) Daniele Mancini (who reports directly to the Secretary General on U.S.-EU relations) told PolMilOff that "if Italy had been asked to join the club, my hope is that it would have refused, although a core group of all the founding members coming together to push the EU forward would make some sense." The UK-French-German initiative is divisive, he continued, and sends the wrong signal to the rest of Europe, not least to the accession states. Moreover, moving forward at three plays into the hands of those who would divide Europe into new and old camps.

6. (C) Comment: Leaving the door open to possible Italian participation in a core group, even under the condition of the collapse of debate on the constitution, calls into question Italy's claim that if asked, it would not have joined the UK-French-German initiative. Readers who recall how hard Italy fought to join exclusive foreign policy

groupings like the Quint and the Contact Group may also find it hard to believe that the Italians are anything other than insulted at not being invited. But times change. Italian officials are clearly dismayed by efforts to create an EU avant-guard at such a crucial moment in the EU constitutional process. Our initial soundings suggest Italy will neither try to break into the club nor seek to create a counterbalancing axis. Rather, it will continue to call for more majority decision making on foreign policy and seek to position itself

as the high-minded champion of inclusive decision making within the EU, hoping that inconsistencies within the "directorate" prevent it from getting political legs. On February 17 (the eve of the next trilateral summit) FM Frattini will make a major foreign policy address to Parliament. We expect that ongoing debate within the Italian government on how to deal with "trilateralism," from both Italian and EU perspectives will be a major theme of his speech.

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